Cause and Effect: Who Is Responsible for Porgera?

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Introduction

What do we owe to our research communities? What duties do we have towards them, and what role should we play in their lives? And how do we answer these questions if it is difficult to locate a coherent, bounded, homogenous thing called a 'community' in the social processes that we study? I've come to ask these questions in the course of my fifteen year involvement with the Porgera gold mine in Enga Province, Papua New Guinea. This time has been 'overheated' in the sense that in Porgera "exogenous and endogenous factors [] lead to instability, uncertainty and unintended consequences" (Eriken n.d.: 1). These events have led me to reflect on my responsibility for Porgera.

These thoughts may also be interesting to you, since mining is an important topic which people feel strongly about, but for which we lack a robust sense of professional ethics. For some, anything but an activist approach to resource conflicts is a betrayal of personal responsibilities. For others, mining is a lucrative opportunity for social engineering. For most people -- including the ones in this room, I reckon -- it's somewhere in-between. Thinking about anthropological responsibility for mining might also be useful because resource conflicts present an 'elementary form' of the ethical situation for anthropologists, and are thus of interest to anyone trying to think about what our anthropological responsibilities are.

My claim here is that we should turn to a certain Arendtian strand of political philosophy to conceive responsibility as an ongoing duty to make existing structural social processes more just, not (or not only) a judgment of guilt regarding a single action done in the past by a single actor.

As a result, I'll argue for an anthropological duty that is shallower than an activist politics, but also one which is much broader and binding, I'd argue, on any one involved in studying mining today. Much of this may be obvious given the distinguished guest list here. In that case, I can at least provide some pictures to help contextualize Catherine's talk.

Porgera

The outlines of my story are simple. When I first visited Porgera to conduct dissertation research in the valley in 1998, the Ipili landowners of the Porgera mine seemed like a success story. Located in Papua New Guinea, in the Enga province, Ipili were first contacted by government patrols in 1939. Gold was discovered in that initial patrol, and a handful of expatriates worked alluvial gold there after World War II. Indigenous ASM also grew in the 1950s, and when the valley was officially 'derestricted' and a government station built in the early 1960s prospecting for large-scale mining began, culminating in the creation of the Porgera Gold Mine in that late 1980s. Ipili landowners received impressive benefits from the government of PNG and Placer Dome, the Canadian operator of the mine, because they seized a moment of opportunity when government failed to halt a rebellion against the Bougainville copper mine, leaving it needful of revenue from a new mine, while simultaneously demonstrating it lacked the military capacity to force one on a local populace.

When I first visited Porgera in 1998 the valley was a decade into mining. It was exciting, dangerous, and the future was uncertain. But there was hope. Obstreporous and determined landowners had managed to squeeze benefits out of a mining company. In their eyes, the mine was an Ipili achievement, a powerful foreign force they had courted and seduced into settling on their land so that the could systematically exploit it. At the end of my nearly two years in the

field, I felt very much like an insider. I had written a history of the valley for Ipili people which was designed to give back to the community that had hosted me. I had also sat in on over a year of negotiations between landowners and the mining company regarding the expansion of mining in the valley, and these negotiations are the topic of my book *Leviathans at the Gold Mine*.

Today, Porgera looks much more like a failed bet than a success story. Following Glenn Banks at al (2013), we can describe the direct ('intentional') changes for which the mine is responsible as well as the unintentional ('immanent') changes in the valley. Direct changes include the murder and rape of people by PJV security guards, the burning of homes and other state violence carried out by the police with the support of the mine, and a subsistence crisis triggered by a growing population and a shrinking subsistence base. These issues have come to the fore especially since 2006, when Placer Dome was acquired by Barrick Gold in a reverse merger which made Barrick the operator of the mine. The violence and sexual violence in particular have been the focus of international attention, including reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Ipili are gaining increased global attention and building alliances with NGOs in Canada and around the world, which again I think Catherine will talk about.

It is difficult to overstate the impact these events have had on life in the valley, but I believe ultimately the indirect changes in the valley are even more worthy of attention, since they are obdurate and create a situation of profound and structural injustice for Ipili people. These include in-migration that threatens to turn Ipili into strangers in their own land, the almost complete retreat of the state and state services, generational conflict between parents who received houses and money from the mine, and their children who must live with the pollution, widespread

interpersonal violence that results in a breakdown of law and order, alcoholism, and shifts in gender dynamics that have led to the rise of polygyny, the rise of HIV/Aids in the valley, demeaning sex work, and sexual violence. To just name a few.

In the past few years, the situation appears to have improved somewhat -- a ban on alcohol was reintroduced in the valley in 2013, and the mine is starting to take issue of law and order issues in the valley by building formal relationships with the police. Whether this is a good thing depends on what you think of close cooperation between a mining company and state forces. But from a distance, Porgera appears to have hit bottom and begun slowly trying to return to normalcy.

Why existing approaches to resource conflicts are popular, but not adequate

In a situation like Porgera's, I find myself asking questions which I am sure many anthropologists have asked themselves over the years: What is going wrong? What can be done to fix it? What do I owe the local community, and which interest groups within it should I develop relationships with?

There is an easy answer to this question, what John Burton (2014) calls an 'avatar narrative' (after the movie avatar) of indigenous people valiantly resisting global capitalism with the help of sympathetic good guy outsiders. This sort of approach leads to a grocery list ethics in which we take a list of officially acceptable subject positions and political opinions, and then check them off as we find them in the field: indigenous people: good. Mining company: Bad. As everyone in this room probably recognizes this is shoddy work, empirically impoverished and morally tone deaf, a pale imitation of the rich and robust ethics a genuinely engaged anthropology should have. And yet ironically, grocery list ethics are easier to find than ever in a

globalized world because of the ease with which they circulate and the need of many stakeholders to get up to speed quickly on local politics. And this despite the fact that overheating's unexpected conjunctions and frictions makes these simple stories even more untenable than they were before.

Porgera is typical, I'm sure you'll recognize, for the way it poses several challenges to Avatar narratives. First, the widespread structural injustice in the valley is the result of a complex knot of causal forces, which is difficult to analyze. Second, assigning blame for Porgera's 'slow motion disaster' is difficult for this same reason. Third, it is not easy to find a single ally because there are multiple factions within 'the mine' and 'the Ipili'. Grassroots Ipili are not homogenous, nor are powerful Porgerans. The interests of the powerful aligned with the grassroots. Nor do I always agree with the tactics the powerful use to pursue ends I endorse. Fourth, instrumentalist confidence is difficult to maintain because it is not clear what concretely can be done to fix lives in the valley — knowing how to improve the situation in the valley is difficult because the causes of disorder are complex and intractable. It is not easy to identify heroes, implement solutions, or understand one's own responsibility.

We all recognize this. Although I have only just met some of you, I'm sure we all grouse regularly about how non experts need to be told again and again 'it is more complicated than that'. But I think we could do more to provide a positive account of our normative commitments that is at least as complex as our empirical understanding of the dynamics of extractive industry.

Liberal responsibility

I've found the Arendtian turn in liberal political philosophy to be useful in understanding these questions. Thinkers such as Patchen Markell (2003), Jade Schiff (2013), and Iris Marion

Young (2006, 2011) are generating interesting new work in political responsibility that should be attractive to anthropologists trying to find their way in an overheated world.

Young in particular, has focused on generating a 'social connection' model of justice which attempts to address issues of structural injustice (what anthropologists such as Paul Farmer would call 'structural violence') within a framework of political liberalism. Young suggests we move from a 'liability' model of responsibility to a 'social connection' model of responsibility. In a liability model, we look at a particular act, determine whose agency is responsible for it, and then move to judge them. This is useful, as in the case of women raped by security guards in Porgera. But it is limited because it focuses on acts, not structural processes, it is temporally backward-looking, and seeks to assign guilt. In contrast, Young proposes a model of 'social connection' which makes people responsible for ongoing social processes based on their connection to them. This is forward-looking, because it asks people what they need to do to make things more just. It seeks to assign responsibility for remedying an ongoing process through future action, rather than assigning built for a past act. A social connection model of justice is especially important in today's world, where we're increasingly connected.

Thus rather than only ask 'who is guilty for crimes committed in Porgera?' we might also ask 'who is responsible for remedying injustice in the valley?'. Young's work is particularly attractive because it has a four factor model for assessing responsibility based on criterial of power, privilege, interest, and collective opportunity. Thus in the case of the exploitative global garment industry, she argues that consumers are privileged as the result of injustice and thus responsible for it, even though they may not be the powerful heads of corporations who run the industry. The president of a corporation may have no collective opportunity to remedy that corporations

injustice because he will be fired and replaced by someone less interested in attempting to escape the corporate straightjacket. Impoverished garment workers, on this account, should not be expected to lift themselves up by the bootstraps through hard work (an idea that may not make sense to this Non-American audience!) because of their lack of power.

More recently, Jade Schiff has cast Young's framework in a Foucaultian vein that allows it to be connected, I think, with the current interest in the anthropology of ethics. She argues that Young's work carries within it a commodified concept of power (that it is a substance you can have 'less' or 'more' of) left over from earlier theories of guilt. Schiff argues that we should engage in a fully processualized version of responsibility and ask not 'who is powerful'? But 'through what processes can we make ourselves, our research communities, and our audiences more responsive to injustice'? In particular, she has focused on how different narratives of crisis and disaster can be used to make responsive to demands for justice -- in other words, she is attempting to provide an account of how to craft narratives that will counter what Stuart Kirsch has a called a politics of resignation.

What This Has To Do With The Anthropology of Mining

Who is responsible, how can we make our social processes more just, and how can we make ourselves more responsive? Answering these questions in the context of mining produces a couple of conclusions.

First, we cannot generate normative accounts of responsibility without generating empirical accounts of overheating processes. In American anthropology, globalization is often seen as an invitation to genre experimentation. I value the avant gardist impulses of anthropology, but I don't think there is something specific about globalization that requires them. It is just another

occasion for them to emerge from our shared habitus. On the contrary, explanation -- dare I say 'causal inference' -- are necessary to understand the world. Explanation -- not just description -- should be back on the menu. But I'm sure people here are in agreement with me, mostly since Thomas didn't seem to invite anyone else.

For instance, are the overheating crises of ASM the same as those that occur in industrial mining? A classification of social processes of overheating may be orthogonal to our lifeworld categories. In other words, there may be no such thing as a viable 'anthropology of mining' or even of 'extractives'. The industrial mining people might have more in common with the petroleum people.

Second, in our overheated world, anthropologists experience now more than ever what dana boyd calls 'context collapse'. We used to just worry about what happened whey 'they' read what 'we' write. Now 'we' read what 'they' write, indigenous anthropologists are both 'we' and 'they' simultaneously, and collaborative fieldwork gainsays the division between 'them' and 'us' at all. '

This situation require anthropologists of mining to expand their sense of audience and genre. Anthropologists of mining must embrace open access scholarship, and even social media. We must become multimodal in our scholarship. This is particularly difficult to do in the case of mining, where feeling run so high and so much information is provided by back channels. It would always be easier to simply not weigh in on stories that attract global audiences. But to do so would mean disavowing the fact that we are always already connected to the extractive industries we cover.

Third, we need to give up on Eurochristian concepts of 'objectivity' and return to the good old classical virtues of judiciousness and prudence. We are connected. In an overheated world, we must all become phronemoi. The other option is not very attractive.

Fourth, we must understand our expertise in a new contexts. The world is awash in low quality information, which means that academics with high standards are more valuable than ever before. At the same time, the contraction of the academy means that there will be less and less of us. We will have more and more partners with whom to work -- NGOs, grassroots people, and so forth. We should try to add value to the network we find ourselves in.

Recognizing this responsibility for our fieldsites -- our kuleana for it, as they say in Hawai‘i -- does not mean that everyone must become an activist. In fact, I do not think it would be useful here to discuss what (single) kind of anthropology the anthropology of mining should be. We need a rich ecosystem of people, ranging from activists to consultants, and with many other sorts of people in between. But I would argue for an ethical engagement that is much broader but also much shallower then that which might be demanded by activists. People doing meso-level comparative work might feel more distanced and less-anguished about their role in mining than an areal specialist with extensive time in the field. But, I argue, they should still feel as beholden to ethical considerations as us -- we serve as an exemplar, I believe, of an ethical reckoning that no responsible person can escape.

Conclusion

In the paper Thomas has written describing his concept of overheating, he argues that Anthropology was not, pace the overheating document, unconcerned with normativity. Its situation REQUIRED normative involvement, whether it was indigenous anthropology or

anthropology of the other. Anthropology does not need change to meet the requirements of an overheated world. Rather, in this overheated world, everyone must become -- to a greater or lesser extent -- anthropologists.

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